

STORY BEHIND THE PERFIN

by Floyd Walker

L-130, Daniel Low & Co., Salem, Mass.

Since my specialty is Perfins which spell words, I tend to try to trace down information about such Perfins. One "word" that attracted my attention is LOW, which the catalog lists as L-130 and identifies as having been used by Daniel Low and Company of Salem, Massachusetts.

From Ed Stuntzner, the assistant sales manager, I recently acquired a cover with the LOW pattern and a corner card with a street address. Even though the cover was postmarked in 1928, I gambled 13¢ (plus a stamped return envelope) and wrote to the old address asking about the Perfin.

A few days later, I received a very cordial letter from a Mr. R. Paine at Daniel Low and Company. Paine reported that the company has been in the mail order business for 108 years and that it issues a catalog each September. The firm first sold only sterling silver, diamonds, watches, fine jewelry, and gifts, but they now carry a line of "soft goods" as well.

Because the firm operates mainly by mail (it is one of the largest in the country, according to Mr. Paine), it handles enormous amounts of postage. Now, of course, the postage is paid by means of a meter.

But before the meter machine, stamps were bought in sheets of 100 and perforated with the owner's last name. Paine reports that the Salem post office was always on the lookout for LOW Perfins used on anything other than letters and parcels from the firm.

The perforator, according to Paine, was a simple single-die hand operated device. What became of the machine when it was replaced by the meter is not known. Quite likely it went the way of most such machines -- tossed onto the junk pile and "recycled" into something more modern.

There is a story behind every Perfin. Some will never be told, but others, thanks to helpful folks like Mr. Paine, will become a matter of philatelic record.

(Editor's note: the editor has in his collection a LOW Perfin cover postmarked in July 1941. Does any member have a LOW cover postmarked earlier or later than the span from 1928 to 1941?)

As a follow-up on Floyd Walker's article on the LOW Perfin in the July-August Bulletin, both Robert Murrin (LM-2) and Edwin Haack (#770) report that they have LOW Perfin covers postmarked in 1917. This represents a use 11 years earlier than the cover mentioned by Walker and establishes that the LOW Perfin was in use at least from 1917 through 1941.